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<p>(21) International Application Number: <b>PCT/US96/08307</b></p> <p>(22) International Filing Date: <b>3 June 1996 (03.06.96)</b></p> <p>(30) Priority Data:</p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td><b>08/471,337</b></td> <td><b>6 June 1995 (06.06.95)</b></td> <td><b>US</b></td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>08/554,271</b></td> <td><b>6 November 1995 (06.11.95)</b></td> <td><b>US</b></td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>08/579,881</b></td> <td><b>28 December 1995 (28.12.95)</b></td> <td><b>US</b></td> </tr> </table> <p>(71) Applicant (for all designated States except US): <b>INTERACTIVE MEDIA WORKS, L.L.C. [US/US]; Suite 200, 10500 Barkley, Overland Park, KS 66212 (US).</b></p> <p>(72) Inventor; and</p> <p>(75) Inventor/Applicant (for US only): <b>TOADER, Adrian [US/US]; 11814 Hardy, Overland Park, KS 66210 (US).</b></p> <p>(74) Agent: <b>ERICKSON, Kent, R.; Litman, McMahon &amp; Brown, L.L.C., Suite 1600, 1200 Main Street, Kansas City, MO 64105 (US).</b></p>	<b>08/471,337</b>	<b>6 June 1995 (06.06.95)</b>	<b>US</b>	<b>08/554,271</b>	<b>6 November 1995 (06.11.95)</b>	<b>US</b>	<b>08/579,881</b>	<b>28 December 1995 (28.12.95)</b>	<b>US</b>	<p>(81) Designated States: <b>AM, AT, AU, BB, BG, BR, BY, CA, CH, CN, CZ, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI, GB, GE, HU, IS, JP, KE, KG, KP, KR, KZ, LK, LR, LT, LU, LV, MD, MG, MK, MN, MW, MX, NO, NZ, PL, PT, RO, RU, SD, SE, SG, SI, SK, TJ, TM, TT, UA, UG, US, UZ, VN, ARIPO patent (KE, LS, MW, SD, SZ, UG), European patent (AT, BE, CH, DE, DK, ES, FI, FR, GB, GR, IE, IT, LU, MC, NL, PT, SE), OAPI patent (BF, BJ, CF, CG, CI, CM, GA, GN, ML, MR, NE, SN, TD, TG).</b></p> <p><b>Published</b></p> <p><i>With international search report.</i></p> <p><i>Before the expiration of the time limit for amending the claims and to be republished in the event of the receipt of amendments.</i></p>
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(54) Title: <b>PROMOTIONAL AND PRODUCT ON-LINE HELP METHODS VIA INTERNET</b>										
<p>(57) Abstract</p> <p>Three methods for promoting a sponsor's products each include the provision of a consumer or potential consumer with Internet access time and software for allowing such Internet access. In a first method (1), free software is distributed for use. In a second method (31), telephone calling cards are distributed which allow a recipient to call and request the software. In a third method (61), the software is distributed with a consumer product to allow the purchaser to access on-line help via the Internet. In each method, an Internet Entry Server (IES) provides the access and performs a registration process (5). The IES then initially gives the user a mandatory "guided tour" (13) of the sponsor's Internet Home Page and domain prior to releasing them to the Internet at large, or, in the third method, to an Internet accessed on-line help service. With each method, the consumer is given a variety of options (91, 101, 111) for extending the access time.</p>										

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## PROMOTIONAL AND PRODUCT ON-LINE HELP METHODS VIA INTERNET

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION5 I. Field of The Invention

The present invention relates to a method for providing sponsor promotion or on-line product help services to consumers while simultaneously providing consumers with Internet access. More particularly, a first  
10 inventive promotion method includes the distribution of Internet access software which allows a consumer to access the Internet via an Internet Entry Server (IES), but which access directs the consumer first to the sponsor's home page for a mandatory tour. A second promotion method  
15 includes the distribution of specialized calling cards. A toll free telephone number is distributed along with the calling cards which number can be called to connect to an Enhanced Entry Server to order free or low cost software for accessing the Internet. For sponsor promotions, the  
20 Internet access software is designed such that, as the user initially accesses the Internet, the sponsor's "home page" and domain is automatically accessed as well. The specialized calling card can be used for Internet access time, for long distance calling time, or for any  
25 combination of Internet time and calling time. Finally, in an on-line help method, a purchaser of a consumer product, such as software, for example, is provided with a predetermined amount of prepaid Internet Access time to an Internet Entry Server which automatically hot-links the  
30 customer to the sponsor/vendor's domain and "Home Page".

The customer can then access the sponsor/vendor's Home page to get on-line help, either in real time or time delayed via Electronic mail, for questions regarding the product.

5    II.   Description of The Related Art

          In marketing of consumer products, particularly in the United States, it has long been common for manufacturers to use promotions in the form of discount coupons, sweepstakes, or other giveaways and contests. One object  
10   of such promotions is to develop a customer profile database which can yield valuable marketing information. Another object is to develop consumer mailing lists to identify customers who would be prime targets for promotional materials.

15       Traditionally, mail-in rebates have been one method of choice for developing such survey information and mailing lists. Such rebates are traditionally distributed by attaching refund offers directly to the product, or to display them alongside the product on a retail shelf, which  
20   refunds can be mailed into the manufacturer, along with a proof of purchase, to get a refund or rebate on the product. Some retail merchants provide a central bulletin board where all of the rebate forms are placed, requiring interested consumers to look through all of the forms to  
25   locate the one or ones in which they are interested. In addition to this time consuming search for relevant refund offers, there are several additional disadvantages of this rebate approach. Members of "discount or rebate clubs" will often take an entire booklet of refund forms from a

display for trade or sale within the club, thus totally disrupting the manufacturer's promotional scheme. The rebate forms must be printed and distributed by the manufacturers to participating retailers, which represents a significant ongoing cost. Often manufacturers can supply only the largest retailers with refund forms, which diminishes the effectiveness of promotions and information gathering by virtually eliminating small merchants from the marketing effort. Consumers often do not know of the existence of the refund until he or she actually examines the product or the display in the store. Furthermore, since rebates are typically for nominal amounts, such as \$.25 or \$.50, for example, the postage costs to mail in these forms for a rebate are often prohibitive if the consumer is asked to bear them or, if the manufacturer uses prepaid postage, the postage will dramatically increase the promotional costs. The requirement to send in a proof of purchase, typically a store receipt, causes additional inconvenience. Finally, where it is important to collect consumer profile or mailing list information in a set time frame, the rebate coupons are returned to a manufacturer over a period of weeks, if not months. Once received, the information on the forms must be coded in by personnel at the manufacturer's collection facility, representing an added expense.

Recent advances in personal computer technology and the ever increasing percentage of the population with access to a personal computer have made the Internet a viable alternative marketing tool. Many on-line computer

services, such as Prodigy and America On-Line, provide, for a fee as a part of their on-line service, software for connecting to and accessing the Internet. There are literally thousands of companies and organizations which maintain Internet/World Wide Web sites or "domains" which are accessible by users of the Internet. A problem with using such Web Sites and associated "Home Pages" as a marketing tool, is the huge number of options available to a user. In other words, without some incentive or direction for a user to access a particular company's home page, there is little likelihood that a particular user will access that home page, or even be aware of its existence.

Recent competition in the long distance carrier market has led to a proliferation of new products and marketing techniques for selling long distance time. One recent innovation is the sale of prepaid telephone calling cards which entitle the bearer to a certain amount of long distance time, typically within the continental United States.

In marketing of many consumer products, including software products, it is customary to provide the customer with a limited amount of free access to on-line help regarding the product. Typically this help is provided via a toll free "800" telephone number or it can be accessed via a customer paid telephone number, i.e. the help is free but the customer pays for the telephone time. It is very expensive for a software developer and vendor to maintain adequate staffing of persons skilled enough technically to

provide reliable software support, particularly to provide real time support during peak inquiry times. Furthermore, toll free telephone accounts can be very expensive, particularly since access to them is typically open ended.

5       It is apparent that a new marketing strategy and method is needed to take advantage of the Internet to provide a more desirable and convenient method of featuring a company's (sponsor's) products or services while providing a reliable source of consumer profile and mailing  
10   list information. Such a method should limit, or even eliminate, the requirement for printing and distributing rebate coupons and should allow sponsors an opportunity to feature, in real time, specific products or services. Such a method should allow the sponsor to target likely  
15   recipients for the Internet access at minimal cost. Such a method should provide the potential for continued marketing access to the customers for additional promotions at minimal or no additional cost to the sponsor.  
Alternatively, an enhanced retail market for telephone  
20   calling cards is needed to maximize card sales. Finally, a reliable method for allowing purchasers of consumer products to access on-line help via the Internet could present significant savings for product manufacturers.

25

#### Summary of the Invention

A first of the inventive methods involves promoting a sponsor's products or services by providing a consumer or potential consumer with sponsor-paid access to the Internet

for a limited time. The method includes the step of distributing, by mail, or in specially marked packages of the sponsor's products, a floppy disc with Internet access software thereon. Associated with the floppy disc is a  
5 unique personal identification number (PIN) along with instructions on installing and using the Internet access software on a personal computer (PC). The Internet access software accesses and "handshakes" with an "Internet Entry Server", which verifies the PIN number, provides the access  
10 and times the user's access time. The Internet Entry Server is programmed to recognize the PIN number as entitling the user to a limited prepaid or "free" Internet access time. Typically such a time period could be 30 minutes, for example, which is paid for by the sponsor. In  
15 return, the Internet Entry Server performs a registration process which includes a number of personal questions and custom data gathering in the form of queries provided by the sponsor for response by the user. The pertinent answers are then immediately provided to the sponsor. The  
20 Internet Entry Server also initially gives the user a mandatory "guided tour" of the sponsor's Home Page and domain where the user is exposed to any current product promotion by the sponsor and can download promotional coupons, product information, etc. After this mandatory  
25 guided tour is completed, the user is allowed to access any other information on the Internet. The Internet Entry Server also tracks the locations visited by the user during the allotted time period, which information is also

provided to the sponsor. The other sites visited can also provide valuable marketing data for the sponsor.

A second one of the inventive methods includes the distribution, by either retail sales, or in a sponsor  
5 promotion, of a specialized telephone calling card. The calling card includes instructions on getting Internet access software and provides for a certain amount of Internet access time and/or long distance calling time. In the event of a sponsor promotion, the cards are  
10 distributed, e.g. by mail or in specially marked packages of the sponsor's products, free or at low cost. For retail sales, the specialized cards are sold at retail outlets or in other standard marketing techniques. In either case, the calling card includes a PIN number along with  
15 instructions on dialling a toll free number to either order some free or low cost Internet access software or make a long distance call. The toll free number connects the customer to an Enhanced Entry Server which can provide either standard long distance calling or a connection to  
20 the Internet. Once connected, the consumer is given verbal instructions on selecting either a long distance call or instructions for ordering the free or low cost software. If the option of receiving software is selected, the consumer is polled for name, address, etc., which is then  
25 associated with the assigned PIN number. The software, on a floppy disc or CD ROM, is then sent to the consumer along with instructions on installing and using the Internet access software on a personal computer (PC).  
Alternatively, the software can be directly downloaded to

the consumer's PC. Telephone access to the Internet is accomplished by utilizing the Internet access time allocated by the calling card. The Internet access software accesses and "handshakes" with the Enhanced Entry Server, which verifies the PIN number, provides the access and times the user's access time. The Enhanced Entry Server is programmed to recognize the PIN number on the calling card as entitling the user to either a limited prepaid Internet access time and/or a time limited ordinary long distance call within the continental U.S. Typically a long distance time period could be 30 minutes, for example, while the Internet access can be for 1 or 2 hours or even days. If the consumer elects to use the calling card solely for long distance calling and does not order the Internet access software, then no further records are kept, but the calling time is treated as simply a consumer product or a sponsor giveaway. However, if the consumer orders the Internet access software and uses it to dial the Entry server, then the Enhanced Entry Server performs a registration process which includes a number of personal questions. Optionally, for sponsor paid cards, as in the first method, custom data is gathered by the Enhanced Entry Server in the form of queries provided by the sponsor for response by the user. The pertinent answers are then immediately provided to the sponsor. Also, in sponsor paid promotions, the Enhanced Entry Server initially gives the user a mandatory "guided tour" of the sponsor's Home Page and domain where the user is exposed to any current product promotion by the sponsor and can download promotional

coupons, product information, etc. After this mandatory guided tour is completed, the user is allowed to access other information on the sponsor's home page, and is then released to access any other information on the Internet.

- 5 The Enhanced Entry Server also tracks the other Internet sites visited by the user during the allotted time period, which information can often provide valuable marketing data. The third of the inventive methods includes the provision of on-line help services to purchasers of a
- 10 sponsor/vendor's consumer products by providing them with vendor-paid access to the Internet for a limited time. The method includes the step of distributing to purchasers, along with the products, a floppy disc with Internet access software thereon. Associated with the floppy disc is a
- 15 unique personal identification number (PIN) along with instructions on installing and using the Internet access software on a personal computer (PC). The Internet access software accesses and "handshakes" with an Internet Entry Server, which verifies the PIN number, provides the access
- 20 and times the user's access time. The Internet Entry Server is programmed to recognize the PIN number as entitling the user to a limited prepaid or "free" Internet access time for on-line help services. Such a time period could be for a total time period such as 1 hour or more, or
- 25 access to on-line help services can be unlimited for 90 days, 6 months, etc., for example, with the access time paid for by the sponsor/vendor. The first time a customer uses the on-line help service, the Internet Entry Server performs a registration process which includes a number of

personal questions and custom data gathering in the form of queries provided by the sponsor/vendor for response by the user. The pertinent answers are then immediately provided to the sponsor/vendor. The Internet Entry Server then

5 "hot-links" the customer to the sponsor/vendor's Internet domain or Home Page for a mandatory "guided tour" where the user is exposed to any current product promotion by the sponsor/vendor and can download promotional coupons, product information, etc. After this mandatory guided tour

10 is completed, the customer is allowed to enter queries for help in installing or using the sponsor/vendor's product. As an optional promotional service, upon termination of the on-line help session, access to other information on the Internet can be provided. All three methods share the

15 common characteristic of, once the prepaid time period is up, prompting the user with one or more of a plurality of options for extending the access period. For example, the user can be prompted to enter a credit card number to which access time will be charged; he or she can be given the

20 opportunity to answer additional survey information in return for additional "free" or prepaid time; or a "900" subscriber paid telephone access number can be provided through which additional access will be billed via the normal telephone company 900 billing cycles.

25

#### Objects and Advantages of the Invention

The principle objects and advantages of the invention include: for the first, sponsor product promotion method, to provide an improved method of featuring a sponsor's

products or services by providing "free" Internet access time to a participating consumer or "user"; to provide such an improved method in which the user is given Internet access software for a PC which interfaces the PC with an

5 Internet Entry Server to provide access to the Internet; to provide such a method in which a unique PIN number is associated with the access software, which PIN number entitles the user to the free Internet access time; to provide such a method in which the Internet Entry Server

10 prompts the user, upon initial dial-up, to register by answering a series of queries provided by the sponsor; to provide such a method in which the user, once the queries are answered, is given a mandatory "guided tour" of the sponsor's home page and domain prior to being given general

15 "browsing" access to the Internet; to provide such a method in which any browsing done by the user is also monitored and reported back to the sponsor for additional marketing information; and to provide such a method which achieves effective exposure and marketing of a sponsor's products or

20 services with minimal expense; for the second, calling card distribution method, to provide an improved method of retailing a specialized calling card or of featuring a sponsor's products or services by providing a free specialized calling card to a consumer which allows either

25 of a limited Internet access time or ordinary long distance calling; to provide such an improved method in which the recipient of the prepaid calling card is given the option of ordering free or low cost Internet access software for a PC which interfaces the PC with an Enhanced Entry Server to

provide access to the Internet; to provide such a method in which a unique PIN number is associated with the prepaid calling card, which PIN number entitles the user to the limited Internet access time and/or calling time; to

5 provide such a method in which the Enhanced Entry Server prompts a user of the Internet access software, upon initial dial-up, to register by answering a series of queries which can include customized survey questions in the event of a sponsor promotion; to provide such a method

10 in which the user, once the queries are answered, is optionally given a mandatory "guided tour" of the sponsor's home page and domain prior to being given general "browsing" access to the Internet; to provide such a method in which any browsing done by the user can also be

15 monitored and reported back to the sponsor for additional marketing information; and, for the on-line help method, to provide an improved method of providing on-line help for customers of a sponsor/vendor's consumer products by providing "free" Internet access time to a the customer; to

20 provide such an improved method in which the customer is given Internet access software for a PC which interfaces the PC with an Internet Entry Server to provide access to the Internet; to provide such a method in which a unique PIN number is associated with the access software, which

25 PIN number entitles the customer to the free Internet access time and on-line help; to provide such a method in which the Internet Entry Server prompts the customer, upon initial dial-up, to register the software by answering a series of queries provided by the sponsor/vendor; to

provide such a method in which the customer, once the registration is complete, is given a mandatory promotional "guided tour" of the sponsor/vendor's home page and domain prior to being given access to on-line help queries and personnel; to provide such a method in which any browsing done by the customer is also monitored and reported back to the sponsor/vendor for additional marketing information; and to provide such a method which achieves effective marketing of a sponsor/vendor's software products while providing on-line help to the customers at minimal expense; and, for all three methods, to provide such a method in which, when the initial allotted on-line help or Internet access time is used up, the customer is given one or more options to acquire additional on-line help and/or Internet access time.

Other objects and advantages of this invention will become apparent from the following description taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings wherein are set forth, by way of illustration and example, certain embodiments of this invention.

The drawings constitute a part of this specification and include exemplary embodiments of the present invention and illustrate various objects and features thereof.

#### **Brief Description of the Drawings**

Fig. 1 is a schematic block diagram of the first method in which sponsor paid Internet access time is provided in return for the collection of marketing data and the promotion of a sponsor's products and/or services.

Fig. 2 is a schematic block diagram of a the second method involving the distribution of specialized calling cards which offer a recipient the option of using the card for either prepaid Internet time or ordinary long distance  
5 calling.

Fig. 3 is a schematic block diagram of the third method of providing sponsor/vendor paid Internet access time for on-line help services while simultaneously promoting registration of the software and marketing the  
10 sponsor/vendor's other products and/or services.

Fig. 4 is a schematic block diagram of a first option for extending a consumer/customer's access to on-line help via the Internet past the initial sponsor/vendor paid access time allotment.

15 Fig. 5 is a schematic block diagram of a second option for extending a consumer/customer's access to on-line help via the Internet past the sponsor/vendor paid access time allotment.

Fig. 6 is a schematic block diagram of a third option  
20 for extending a consumer/customer's access to on-line help via the Internet past the sponsor/vendor paid access time allotment.

25

### Detailed Description of the Invention

As required, detailed embodiments of the present invention are disclosed herein; however, it is to be understood that the disclosed embodiments are merely

exemplary of the invention, which may be embodied in various forms. Therefore, specific details disclosed herein are not to be interpreted as limiting, but merely as a basis for the claims and as a representative basis for  
5 teaching one skilled in the art to variously employ the present invention in virtually any appropriate manner.

Referring to Fig. 1, the numeral 1 generally refers to a method of providing a consumer or user with a sponsor-paid Internet access time allotment while collecting  
10 marketing data for the sponsor and featuring the sponsor's products and/or special services.

At block 2, the sponsor provides the user with Internet access software and a PIN number which authorizes the user to access the Internet for the allotted time  
15 period. Distribution can be accomplished in a number of ways, including, but not limited to placing program floppy discs, instructions and PIN numbers in specially marked packages of a sponsor's product, providing a toll free number which users can call to receive a package including  
20 the floppy and PIN number, and/or distributing packages through retail outlets which sell the sponsor's products. At block 3, the user installs the program on his or her PC and initiates the toll free call and log-in procedure to the Internet Entry Server (IES) via the PC's modem. At  
25 block 4, the IES receives the protocol handshake automatically entered by the PC and verifies the user's PIN number. At block 5, the IES prompts the user with a customized "welcome" screen which preferably features the sponsor's logo and other sponsor supplied information. At

this point, the user is requested to register by supplying answers to queries, including typical questions such as name, address, age, gender, etc. as well as sponsor supplied specialized survey queries. At block 6, the user provides answers to the questions, wherein, at block 11, the IES collects the information and compiles a database profile for this user, forwards the profile to the sponsor, and activates a timer to time the user's Internet access.

At block 12, the IES activates an Internet navigational software "browser" program on the user's PC. Such browser programs are widely available, and include titles such as Netscape, Mosaic, etc. The IES directs the browser program to directly connect (hot-link) the user to the Internet domain/Home Page of the sponsor, signified by block 13. At block 13, the user is conducted through a mandatory "guided tour" of the sponsors domain where he or she is exposed to any promotional information, coupon retrieval options, etc., which the sponsor wants to feature. After the sponsor domain guided tour, at block 14, the IES returns control to the user who is now free to visit other areas of interest within the sponsor's domain and then, at block 15, the user is released to visit other domains or areas of interest within the Internet for the remaining time of the sponsor paid allotment. At block 21, the IES provides an open link to the Internet for the remainder of the time period and also keeps a record of other domains visited by the user until the IES clock, at block 22, times out the initial period and brings up a predefined informational screen to the user, again

preferably featuring the sponsor's logo and identifying information. On this informational screen, one or more alternatives (Figs. 4-6) are provided to the user to extend or "refresh" the Internet access time. At block 23, the user reads the informational interrupt screen and makes a decision about logging off or refreshing his allotted time period.

Referring to Fig. 2, the numeral 31 generally refers to a method of providing a consumer or user with a specialized prepaid calling card which allows the recipient to make long distance calls and/or allows a limited Internet access time. In addition, the card allows the recipient to order free or low cost Internet access software. For sponsor distributed cards, the method includes collecting marketing data for the sponsor as well as featuring the sponsor's products and/or special services.

At block 32, the sponsor or a retailer distributes, either independently or along with a sponsor product, a telephone long distance calling card (not shown). For sponsor promotions, the card can be distributed free but, alternatively, the calling cards can simply be a value added consumer item. The card, for example, can take the form and size of an ordinary plastic credit card and can include printed indicia including a personal identification number (PIN). An instruction set is preferably printed on the card as well, but could be distributed in a separate paper or card. The instruction set can read, for example, as follows:

THIS CARD ENTITLES THE BEARER TO INTERNET ACCESS SOFTWARE FOR YOUR PERSONAL COMPUTER AND TO 2 HOURS OF INTERNET ACCESS TIME. PLEASE DIAL 1-800-555-5555 AND FOLLOWING THE VERBAL INSTRUCTIONS TO ORDER YOUR  
5 INTERNET SOFTWARE. AS AN ALTERNATIVE, THIS CARD CAN BE USED FOR 30 MINUTES LONG DISTANCE CALLING WITHIN THE CONTINENTAL U.S. BY DIALLING 1-800-555-5555 AND ENTERING THE PERSONAL IDENTIFICATION NUMBER (PIN) PRINTED ABOVE AND THEN FOLLOWING THE VERBAL CALLING  
10 INSTRUCTIONS

The calling card thus provides the user with a PIN number and instructions for ordering the Internet access software. Once the Internet access software is received and loaded, the PIN number can be used either for computer  
15 access to the Internet for the allotted time period or for ordinary long distance calls or any combination of the two totalling the allotted time. Distribution of the telephone calling cards can be accomplished in a number of ways, including, but not limited to, placing them in specially  
20 marked packages of a sponsor's product and/or distributing them free, or selling them at retail through retail outlets.

Referring again to Fig. 2, at block 32, the user dials the toll free number and, at block 33, the Enhanced Entry  
25 Server (EES) gives verbal instructions on either completing the long distance call or ordering the software. For example, the instructions might be "Please Dial 1 to complete a long distance call or Dial 2 if you wish to receive the free Internet software". If the user dials

"1", at block 34 the EES instructs the user to enter the PIN, verifies the entered PIN and allows the user to simply dial any allowed long distance number and receive up to 30 minutes (for example) of long distance calling time, which  
5 is timed by the EES. Alternatively, if the user is interested in receiving the Internet access software, the user dials 2 and, at block 35, the EES verifies the PIN number, queries the user for their name, address, etc., and forwards the software to the user. At block 40, the user  
10 answers the queries and receives the software, either by mail, or, optionally, by downloading to a computer. At block 41, the user installs the access software on his or her PC and initiates the toll free call and log-in procedure to the EES via the PC's modem, preferably by  
15 simply selecting a "hot button" on a menu screen. At block 42, the EES receives the protocol handshake automatically entered by the PC and verifies the user's PIN number. Also at block 42, the EES prompts the user with a customized "welcome" screen which can be personalized to the user  
20 since the user's name and address has already been associated with the PIN number in the EES database. For sponsor supplied cards, the welcome screen preferably features the sponsor's logo and other sponsor supplied information. At this point, the user is requested to  
25 register by supplying answers to queries, including typical questions such as address, age, gender, etc., and, again for sponsor provided cards, additional sponsor supplied specialized survey queries. The user provides answers to the questions and the EES collects the information and

compiles a database profile for this user and activates a timer to time the user's Internet access.

Again, at block 42, the EES activates an Internet navigational software "browser" program on the user's PC.

- 5 Such browser programs are widely available, and include titles such as Netscape, Mosaic, etc. For sponsor supplied cards, the EES optionally directs the browser program to directly connect (hot-link) the user to the Internet domain/Home Page of the sponsor, signified by block 44. At
- 10 block 44, the user is conducted through a mandatory "guided tour" of the sponsor's domain where he or she is exposed to any promotional information, coupon retrieval options, etc., which the sponsor wants to feature. After the optional sponsor domain guided tour, at block 45, the EES
- 15 returns control to the user who is now free to visit other areas of interest, either within the sponsor's domain if he or he has been hot-linked there, or elsewhere as the user is released to visit other domains or areas of interest within the Internet for the remaining time allotment
- 20 provided by the calling card. At block 51, the EES provides an open link to the Internet for the remainder of the time period and also keeps a record of other domains visited by the user until the EES clock, at block 52, times out the initial period and brings up a predefined
- 25 informational screen to the user. For sponsor provided cards this screen can again feature the sponsor's logo and identifying information. On this informational screen, as in the method of Fig. 1, one or more alternatives (Figs. 4-6) are provided to the user to extend or "refresh" the

Internet access time. At block 53, the user reads the informational interrupt screen and makes a decision about logging off or refreshing his allotted time period. Of course, the user can log off of the Internet at any time  
5 after registration and can reserve any remaining allotted time for later Internet access use or for ordinary long distance calling.

Referring to Fig. 3, the numeral 61 generally refers to a method of providing a purchaser of a consumer product  
10 with a sponsor/vendor-paid Internet access time allotment for on-line service help with the software while promoting registration of the customer and simultaneously providing an effective marketing tool for marketing other products to the customer.

15 At block 62, the customer purchases a product, such as a software product, and, along with the product the vendor or sponsor provides the customer with Internet access software and a PIN number which authorizes the customer to access the Internet for an allotted time period in order to  
20 access on-line help services for the product. At block 63, the customer loads the Internet access software and initiates log-in. Log-in can be a requirement during the set-up phase of the purchased software, for example, such that registration is automatically accomplished. For  
25 example, during set-up the software can cause the customer's PC to automatically dial a toll free number to access the sponsor's domain and registration can be accomplished as described below for all customers. Alternatively, log-in can be accomplished selectively by

the customer only when he or she has a problem or question for the sponsor/vendor about the product. It should be noted here that, although the product is described herein as software, any other suitable consumer product for which on-line help is provided can be substituted. For example, manufacturers of home appliances, automobiles, or other products with relatively complex control systems can provide customers with on-line help over the Internet by using the method disclosed and described herein. If the product is software, the Internet access software can be an integral part of the purchased software package. In that situation, step 3 would be accomplished simply by loading and initializing the purchased software.

At block 64, the IES receives the protocol handshake automatically entered by the PC and verifies the customer's PIN number. At block 65, the IES prompts the customer with a customized "welcome" screen which preferably features the sponsor/vendor's logo and other sponsor/vendor supplied information. At this point, the customer is requested to register by supplying answers to queries, including typical questions such as name, address, age, gender, etc. as well as sponsor/vendor supplied specialized survey queries. For purposes of receiving "time-shifted" help, as explained below, the customer can be requested to enter an Electronic mail address during registration as well. At block 66, the customer provides answers to the questions, wherein, at block 71, the IES collects the information and compiles a database profile for this customer, forwards the profile to

the sponsor, and activates a timer or starts a calendar to time the customer's Internet on-line help access.

At block 72, the IES activates an Internet navigational software "browser" program on the customer's PC. Such browser programs are widely available, and include titles such as Netscape, Mosaic, etc. The IES directs the browser program to directly connect (hot-link) the customer to the Internet domain/Home Page of the sponsor, signified by block 73. At block 73, the customer is conducted through a mandatory "guided tour" of the sponsors domain where he or she is exposed to any product promotional information, coupon retrieval options, etc., which the sponsor wants to feature. After the sponsor domain guided tour, at block 74, the customer now has access to the on-line help features provided by the sponsor. The customer can type in questions and receive answers in one of two ways. At block 75, when help staff is available for real time answers, i.e. as a question is entered, someone on the sponsor's staff has a "live" discussion with the customer and provides immediate answers to the questions. Block 76 illustrates an alternative in which the sponsor provides "time shifted" responses. For example, when all staff are busy or during off hours, queries can be logged in and answered later via Electronic mail. The customer's Electronic mail address can be provided as a feature of the log-on or registration procedure, as described above. At block 81, the customer can repeat the access to the sponsor's domain for additional help inquiries at any time during which he is

still entitled to on-line help. For example, each customer can be given a total of 2 hours of help time which can be used at any time, or he or she can be given unlimited access to on-line help during the first 90 days after  
5 purchase and registration. At block 82, the IES clock or calendar times out the initial period and brings up a predefined informational screen to the customer, again preferably featuring the sponsor's logo and identifying information. On this informational screen, one or more  
10 alternatives (Figs. 4-6) are provided to the customer to extend or "refresh" the time during which access to on-line help is available via the Internet.

Referring to Fig. 4, a block diagram of a first option for refreshing the Internet time allotment is illustrated.  
15 In this option, the user can give a credit card number to which additional Internet access time will be billed via the normal IES or EES billing procedure. At block 91, the user chooses the credit card option from a menu of refresh options and provides his or her credit card information as  
20 well as a time purchase to the IES or EES. At block 92, the IES (or EES) receives the credit card information, performs an on-line validation from a credit card validation database (block 93), provides confirmation to the user and credits the user's PIN account with the  
25 additional time. At block 94, the user reactivates the browser program and continues the Internet access or logs off and reserves the purchased time for later use. At block 95, each time the user reactivates the Internet browser program, a screen is presented which features the

sponsor's logo or other identifying data and an option to hot-link to the sponsor's domain, possibly for no charge during the sponsor domain access. At block 96, the user is billed during the normal credit card billing cycle.

5        Fig. 5 illustrates a block schematic diagram of a second option for refreshing the user's Internet time allotment. In this option, the user can take an additional "survey", answering additional questions and/or providing further information solicited by the sponsor, and, in  
10    return, receives an additional sponsor paid Internet time allotment. At block 101, the user chooses the Survey refresh option and, at block 102, the EES connects the user to a survey screen or hot-links the user to the sponsor domain where the user interactively provides the required  
15    information. Once the additional survey is complete, the sponsor, again at block 103, authorizes the additional Internet connect time allotment to the user. At block 104, the user reactivates the browser program and re-accesses the Internet or logs off and reserves the additional time  
20    for later use. At block 105, as in block 95 in Fig. 4, each time the user logs on, a sponsor tailored information screen is displayed with sponsor hot-link options.

      Fig. 6 illustrates a block schematic diagram of a third option for refreshing the user's Internet time  
25    allotment. In this option, the user can access the EES via a "900" subscriber pay number where Internet access time will be billed through the user's telephone company 900 billing procedures. At block 111, the 900 number option is selected, whereupon the user logs off and, either

immediately or at a future time, calls the assigned 900 number, using a touch-tone telephone. The 900 call proceeds through normal call channels including, at blocks 112 and 113, respectively, the user's local central office and long distance carrier, terminating at an EES linked audiotext computer system at block 114. At block 115 the EES assigns a new PIN number, or, alternatively, at block 121, prompts the entry of the old, originally assigned PIN number. At block 122, the PIN information is used to open a new account. Finally, at block 123, billing is done via normal long distance carrier and/or telephone company 900 billing procedures at a billing rate provided by the EES. Subsequent to access time being credited to user, he logs on via new or refreshed PIN. For sponsor provided cards, at block 124, Internet access screens are provided which preferably include the sponsor's logo or other information and a hot-link option to access the sponsor's domain with each log-on by the user. Again, the time consumed by the user in visiting the sponsor's domain can be provided free of charge.

The inventive promotion method allows a sponsor to accurately and efficiently target likely recipients for their Internet access promotion by eliminating those customers with no interest in, or no ability to access the Internet. In other words, the prepaid telephone calling cards are much more economical to distribute than the Internet access software, now called "sampleNet<sub>TM</sub>". By first distributing the telephone calling cards, now called "phoneNet<sub>TM</sub>" cards, along with instructions on how to order

the Internet access software, the software is distributed only to those customers interested and equipped to use it. Furthermore, since the calling cards have an intrinsic value which is greater than a standard prepaid calling

5 card, i.e. the long distance calling time and the Internet access time and software, they can actually be sold over retail counters, either as a stand alone consumer product, or to recoup a portion of the sponsor's costs, and/or as an incentive for retailers to participate in the sponsor's

10 promotional program. The Enhanced Entry Server is equipped to allow either Internet access or long distance calling or any combination thereof by confirming the same PIN number. The customer who acquires and uses the Internet access software gains a free or low cost, "hassle-free" entry into

15 the Internet while the customer who is not interested or who is not equipped to use the software gets a valuable long distance calling card.

It is to be understood that while certain forms of the present invention have been illustrated and described

20 herein, it is not to be limited to the specific forms or arrangement of parts described and shown.

C L A I M S

What is claimed and desired to be secured by Letters Patent is as follows:

1. A method of providing a sponsor paid Internet connect time allotment to a user while simultaneously collecting survey data for the sponsor comprising the steps of:
  - a. providing a PIN number to the user which PIN number entitles the user to log on to an Internet Entry Server;
  - b. prompting the user to answer a series of queries, with the answers forming said survey data as the user logs on to the Internet Entry Server; and
  - c. allowing the user to access the Internet for a predetermined time once the user has responded to all of the queries.
2. A method as in claim 1, and further comprising the step of:
  - a. initially hot linking said user to an Internet domain or Home Page of the sponsor upon initial Internet access.
3. A method as in claim 2, and further comprising the step of:
  - a. conducting said user through a guided tour of the sponsor's Internet domain; and

- b. allowing said user to browse other Internet domains only after said guided tour is concluded.
- 4. A method as in claim 3, and further comprising the step of:
  - a. keeping a record of the said other Internet domains accessed by said user after said guided tour is concluded.
- 5. A method as in claim 1, and further comprising the step of:
  - a. providing said user with one or more options to extend the Internet access time after said predetermined time period has expired.
- 6. A method as in claim 5, and further wherein:
  - a. said options to extend include providing a credit card number to which further Internet access time can be charged.
- 7. A method as in claim 5, and further wherein:
  - a. said options to extend include answering further survey questions in return for an extension of the sponsor paid Internet access time.
- 8. A method as in claim 5, and further wherein:
  - a. said options to extend include a 900 call service whereby said user accesses said Internet Entry Server after calling a subscriber paid 900

telephone number for further Internet access time.

9. A method as in claim 5, and further including the step of:
  - a. displaying an initial display screen each time the user accesses the Internet via said Internet Entry Server which display screen includes sponsor related displays or other sponsor related information.
10. A method as in claim 9, and further wherein:
  - a. said initial display screen includes instructions on selecting a hot link to the sponsor Internet domain.
11. A method as in claim 10, and further wherein:
  - a. access time during the hot link to the sponsor domain is paid for by the sponsor.
12. A method of providing a sponsor paid Internet connect time allotment to a user while simultaneously collecting survey data for the sponsor comprising the steps of:
  - a. providing a PIN number to the user which PIN number entitles the user to log on to an Internet Entry Server;

- b. prompting the user to answer a series of queries, with the answers forming said survey data as the user logs on to the Internet Entry Server;
  - c. allowing the user to access the Internet for a predetermined time period once the user has responded to all of the queries; and
  - d. initially hot linking said user to an Internet domain or Home Page of the sponsor upon initial Internet access.
- 13. A method as in claim 12, and further comprising the step of:
  - a. conducting said user through a guided tour of the sponsor's Internet domain; and
  - b. allowing said user to browse other Internet sites only after said guided tour is concluded.
- 14. A method as in claim 13, and further comprising the step of:
  - a. keeping a record of the said other Internet domains accessed by said user after said guided tour is concluded.
- 15. A method as in claim 12, and further comprising the step of:
  - a. providing said user with one or more options to extend the Internet access time after said predetermined time period has expired.

16. A method as in claim 15, and further wherein:
  - a. said options to extend include providing a credit card number to which further Internet access time can be charged.
17. A method as in claim 15, and further wherein:
  - a. said options to extend include answering further survey questions in return for an extension of the sponsor paid Internet access time.
18. A method as in claim 15, and further wherein:
  - a. said options to extend include a 900 call service whereby said user accesses said Internet Entry Server after calling a subscriber paid 900 telephone number for further Internet access time.
19. A method as in claim 15, and further including the step of:
  - a. displaying an initial display screen each time the user accesses the Internet via said Internet Entry Server which display screen includes sponsor related displays or other sponsor related information.
20. A method as in claim 19, and further wherein:
  - a. said initial display screen includes instructions on selecting a hot link to the sponsor Internet domain.

21. A method as in claim 20, and further wherein:
  - a. access time during the hot link to the sponsor domain is paid for by the sponsor.
22. A method of providing a sponsor paid Internet connect time allotment to a user while simultaneously collecting survey data for the sponsor comprising the steps of:
  - a. providing a PIN number to the user which PIN number entitles the user to log on to an Internet Entry Server;
  - b. prompting the user to answer a series of queries, with the answers forming said survey data as the user logs on to the Internet Entry Server;
  - c. allowing the user to access the Internet for a predetermined time once the user has responded to all of the queries;
  - d. initially hot linking said user to an Internet domain or Home Page of the sponsor upon initial Internet access;
  - e. conducting said user through a guided tour of the sponsor's Internet domain; and
  - f. allowing said user to browse other Internet sites only after said guided tour is concluded.

23. A method as in claim 22, and further comprising the step of:
- a. keeping a record of the said other Internet domains accessed by said user after said guided tour is concluded.
24. A method as in claim 22, and further comprising the step of:
- a. providing said user with one or more options to extend the Internet access time after said predetermined time period has expired.
25. A method as in claim 24, and further wherein:
- a. said options to extend include providing a credit card number to which further Internet access time can be charged.
26. A method as in claim 24, and further wherein:
- a. said options to extend include answering further survey questions in return for an extension of the sponsor paid Internet access time.
27. A method as in claim 24, and further wherein:
- a. said options to extend include a 900 call service whereby said user accesses said Internet Entry Server after calling a subscriber paid 900 telephone number for further Internet access time.

28. A method as in claim 24, and further including the step of:
- a. displaying an initial display screen each time the user accesses the Internet via said Internet Entry Server which display screen includes sponsor related displays or other sponsor related information.
29. A method as in claim 28, and further wherein:
- a. said initial display screen includes instructions on selecting a hot link to the sponsor Internet domain.
30. A method as in claim 29, and further wherein:
- (a) access time during the hot link to the sponsor domain is paid for by the sponsor.
31. A method of providing an enhanced value specialized prepaid calling card to a user comprising the steps of:
- a. distributing the prepaid telephone calling card with associated PIN number to the user which prepaid telephone calling card and PIN number entitles the user to log onto an Enhanced Entry Server and to access any combination of either:
    - i. Internet access for a limited time; and/or
    - ii. ordinary long distance calling for a limited time;

- b. prompting the user to either complete the long distance call or, alternatively, to order Internet access software which allows the user to connect a personal computer (PC) to the Enhanced Entry Server to access the Internet.
- 32. A method as in claim 31, and, in response to the user opting to order the software, further comprising the steps of:
  - a. sending the Internet access software to the user;
  - b. prompting the user to log onto the Enhanced Entry Server via his or her PC using the Internet access software and to enter the PIN number;
  - c. prompting the user to register with the Enhanced Entry Server as the user initially logs on; and
  - d. allowing the user to access the Internet for said limited time once the user has responded to all of the queries.
- 33. A method as in claim 32, wherein the cards are distributed by a sponsor as a promotion, said method further comprising the step of:
  - a. hot linking said user directly to an Internet domain or Home Page of the sponsor upon initial Internet access.

34. A method as in claim 33, said method further comprising the step of simultaneously collecting specialized survey data for the sponsor as the user initially logs onto the Enhanced Entry Server.
35. A method as in claim 33, and further comprising the step of:
- a. conducting said user through a guided tour of the sponsor's Internet domain; and
  - b. allowing said user to browse other Internet domains only after said guided tour is concluded.
36. A method as in claim 35, and further comprising the step of:
- a. keeping a record of the said other Internet domains accessed by said user after said guided tour is concluded.
37. A method as in claim 33, and further including the step of:
- a. displaying an initial display screen each time the user accesses the Internet via said Enhanced Entry Server which display screen includes sponsor related displays or other sponsor related information.

38. A method as in claim 37, and further wherein:
- a. said initial display screen includes instructions on selecting a hot link to the sponsor Internet domain.
39. A method as in claim 38, and further wherein:
- a. access time during the hot link to the sponsor domain is paid for by the sponsor.
40. A method as in claim 32, and further comprising the step of:
- a. providing said user with one or more options to extend the Internet access time after said predetermined time period has expired.
41. A method as in claim 40, and further wherein:
- a. said options to extend include one or more of the following:
    - i. providing a credit card number to which further Internet access time can be charged;
    - ii. answering further survey questions in return for an extension of the sponsor paid Internet access time; and/or
    - iii. a 900 call service whereby said user accesses said Enhanced Entry Server after calling a subscriber paid 900 telephone number for further Internet access time.

42. A method of providing an enhanced value specialized prepaid calling card to a user comprising the steps of:
- a. distributing a prepaid telephone calling card with associated PIN number to the user which prepaid telephone calling card and PIN number entitles the user to log onto an Enhanced Entry Server and to access any combination of either:
    - i. Internet access for a limited time; and/or
    - ii. ordinary long distance calling for a limited time;
  - b. prompting the user who initially contacts the Enhanced Entry Server to either complete the long distance call or to order Internet access software;
  - c. sending the Internet access software to a user who orders it;
  - d. prompting the user to log onto the Enhanced Entry Server via his or her PC using the Internet access software and to enter the PIN number;
  - e. prompting the user to register by answering a series of queries as the user initially logs onto the Enhanced Entry Server;
  - f. allowing the user to access the Internet for a predetermined time period once the user has registered.

43. A method as in claim 42, and further comprising the step of:
- a. providing said user with one or more options to extend the Internet access time after said predetermined time period has expired.
44. A method as in claim 43, and further wherein:
- a. said options to extend include one or more of the following:
    - i. providing a credit card number to which further Internet access time can be charged;
    - ii. answering further survey questions in return for an extension of the sponsor paid Internet access time; and/or
    - iii. a 900 call service whereby said user accesses said Enhanced Entry Server after calling a subscriber paid 900 telephone number for further Internet access time.
45. A method of providing a sponsor paid Internet connect time allotment to a user while simultaneously collecting survey data for the sponsor and promoting the sponsor's products or services comprising the steps of:
- a. distributing a prepaid telephone calling card with associated PIN number to the user which prepaid telephone calling card and PIN number entitles the user to log onto an Enhanced Entry Server and to access any combination of either:

- i. Internet access for a limited time; and/or
  - ii. ordinary long distance calling for a limited time;
- b. prompting the user, upon initial contact with the Enhanced Entry Server, to either complete a long distance call or order Internet access software;
- c. sending the Internet access software to an ordering user;
- d. prompting the user to log onto the Enhanced Entry Server via his or her PC using the Internet access software;
- e. verifying the PIN number of the user upon log-on;
- f. prompting the user to answer a series of queries, with the answers forming said survey data as the user initially logs onto the Enhanced Entry Server;
- g. allowing the user to access the Internet for a predetermined time once the user has responded to all of the queries;
- h. initially hot linking said user to an Internet domain or Home Page of the sponsor upon Internet access;
- i. conducting said user through a guided tour of the sponsor's Internet domain; and
- j. allowing said user to browse other Internet sites only after said guided tour is concluded.

46. A method as in claim 45, and further comprising the step of:
- a. keeping a record of the said other Internet domains accessed by said user after said guided tour is concluded.
47. A method as in claim 45, and further comprising the step of:
- a. providing said user with one or more options to extend the Internet access time after said predetermined time period has expired.
48. A method as in claim 47, and further wherein:
- a. said options to extend include one or more of the following:
    - i. providing a credit card number to which further Internet access time can be charged;
    - ii. answering further survey questions in return for an extension of the sponsor paid Internet access time; and/or
    - iii. a 900 call service whereby said user accesses said Enhanced Entry Server after calling a subscriber paid 900 telephone number for further Internet access time.
49. A method as in claim 47, and further including the step of:

- a. displaying an initial display screen each time the user accesses the Internet via said Enhanced Entry Server which display screen includes sponsor related displays or other sponsor related information.
50. A method as in claim 49, and further wherein:
- a. said initial display screen includes instructions on selecting a hot link to the sponsor Internet domain.
51. A method as in claim 50, and further wherein:
- (a) access time during the hot link to the sponsor domain is paid for by the sponsor.
52. A method of providing a sponsor paid Internet connect time allotment to a customer of the sponsor's products for on-line help relating to those products, said method comprising the steps of:
- a. providing a PIN number to the customer which PIN number entitles the customer to log on to an Internet Entry Server;
  - b. hot-linking the customer directly into an Internet domain of the sponsor upon log on to the Internet Entry Server by the customer; and
  - c. allowing the customer to access help on-line in the Internet domain of the sponsor by inputting help queries and receiving help answers.

53. A method as in claim 52 and further comprising the step of:
- a. prompting the customer to answer a series of queries upon log on to the Internet Entry Server to register the product.
54. A method as in claim 52, wherein said product is a software product, said method further comprising the step of:
- a. prompting the customer to answer a series of queries upon initial installation of said software product and forwarding the answers to said sponsor via said Internet Entry Server to register the product.
55. A method as in claim 52, and further comprising the step of:
- a. conducting said customer through a guided tour of the sponsor's Internet domain prior to allowing access to on-line help.
56. A method as in claim 52, wherein said access to said on-line help is available to said customer for a limited time period, said method further comprising the step of:
- a. providing said customer with one or more options to extend the time for which said on-line help is available after said limited time period has expired.

57. A method as in claim 56, and further wherein said options to extend include one or more of the following:
- a. providing a credit card number to which further Internet access time can be charged;
  - b. answering further survey questions in return for an extension of the sponsor paid Internet access time; and
  - c. a 900 call service whereby said customer accesses said Internet Entry Server after calling a subscriber paid 900 telephone number for further Internet access time.
58. A method as in claim 52, and further including the step of:
- a. displaying an initial display screen each time the customer accesses the Internet via said Internet Entry Server which display screen includes sponsor related displays or other sponsor related information.
59. A method as in claim 52, wherein said on-line help answers can selectively be provided in a time delay fashion via electronic mail.
60. A method of providing a sponsor paid Internet connect time allotment to a customer of the sponsor's products for on-line help relating to those products, said method comprising the steps of:

- a. providing a PIN number to the customer which PIN number entitles the customer to log on to an Internet Entry Server;
  - b. hot-linking the customer directly into an Internet domain of the sponsor upon log on to the Internet Entry Server by the customer;
  - c. conducting said customer through a guided tour of the sponsor's Internet domain; and
  - d. allowing the customer to access help on-line in the Internet domain of the sponsor by inputting help queries and receiving help answers.
61. A method as in claim 60, and further comprising the step of:
- a. prompting the customer to answer a series of queries upon log on to the Internet Entry Server to register the product.
62. A method as in claim 60, wherein said product is a software product, said method further comprising the step of:
- a. prompting the customer to answer a series of queries upon initial installation of said software product and forwarding the answers to said sponsor via said Internet Entry Server to register the product.

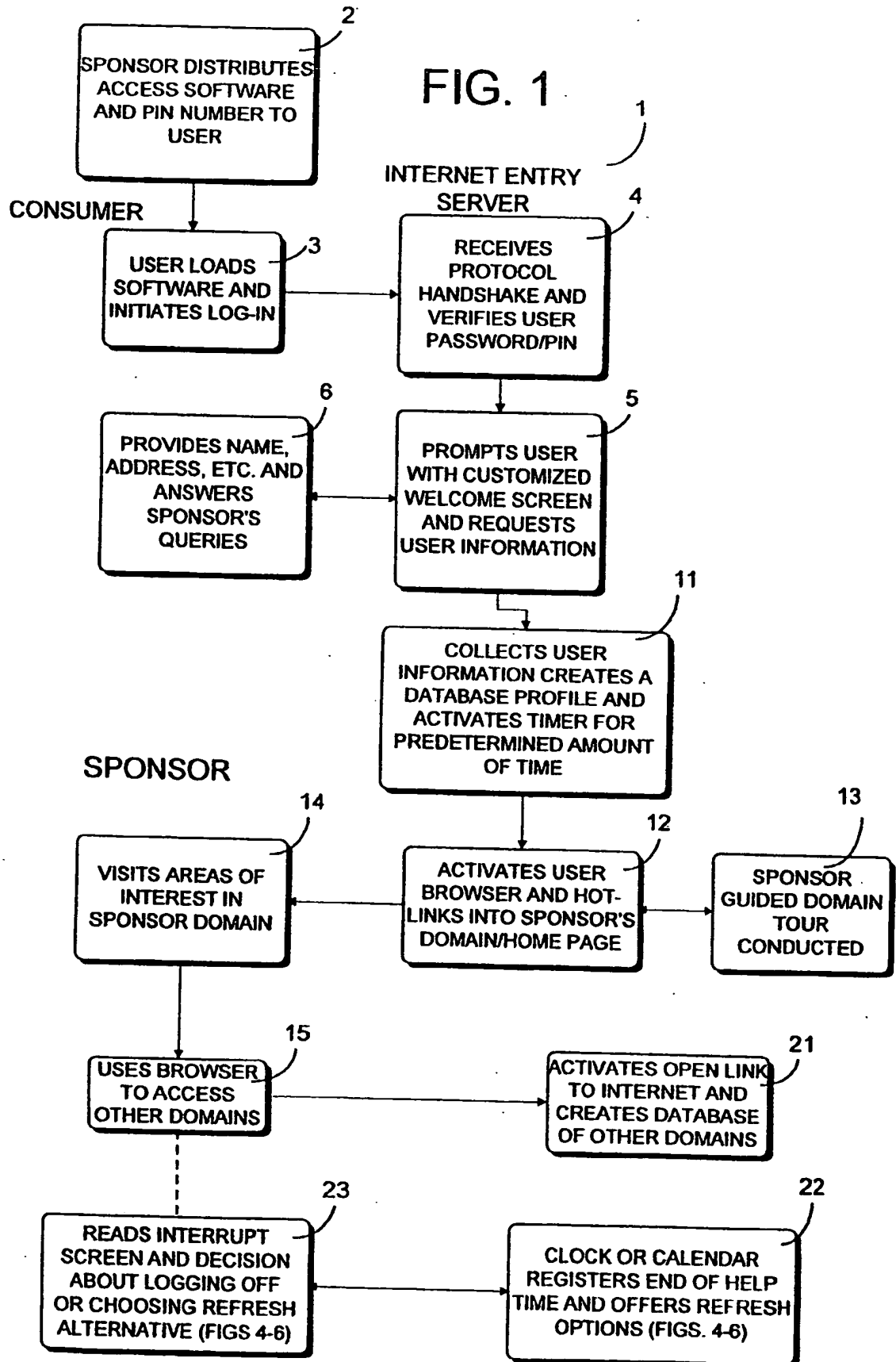
63. A method as in claim 60, wherein said access to said on-line help is available to said customer for a limited time period, said method further comprising the step of:
- a. providing said customer with one or more options to extend the time for which said on-line help is available after said limited time period has expired.
64. A method as in claim 63, and further wherein said options to extend include one or more of the following:
- a. providing a credit card number to which further Internet access time can be charged;
  - b. answering further survey questions in return for an extension of the sponsor paid Internet access time; and
  - c. a 900 call service whereby said customer accesses said Internet Entry Server after calling a subscriber paid 900 telephone number for further Internet access time.
65. A method as in claim 60, and further including the step of:
- a. displaying an initial display screen each time the customer accesses the Internet via said Internet Entry Server which display screen includes sponsor related displays or other sponsor related information.

66. A method as in claim 60, wherein said on-line help answers can selectively be provided in a time delay fashion via electronic mail.
67. A method of providing a sponsor paid Internet connect time allotment to a customer of the sponsor's products for on-line help relating to those products, said method comprising the steps of:
- a. providing a PIN number to the customer which PIN number entitles the customer to log on to an Internet Entry Server;
  - b. hot-linking the customer directly into an Internet domain of the sponsor upon log on to the Internet Entry Server by the customer;
  - c. prompting the customer to answer a series of queries to register the product;
  - d. conducting said customer through a guided tour of the sponsor's Internet domain; and
  - e. allowing the customer to access help on-line in the Internet domain of the sponsor by inputting help queries and receiving help answers.
68. A method as in claim 67, wherein said access to said on-line help is available to said customer for a limited time period, said method further comprising the step of:

- a. providing said customer with one or more options to extend the time for which said on-line help is available after said limited time period has expired.
69. A method as in claim 68, and further wherein said options to extend include one or more of the following:
- a. providing a credit card number to which further Internet access time can be charged;
  - b. answering further survey questions in return for an extension of the sponsor paid Internet access time; and
  - c. a 900 call service whereby said customer accesses said Internet Entry Server after calling a subscriber paid 900 telephone number for further Internet access time.
70. A method as in claim 67, wherein said on-line help answers can selectively be provided in a time delay fashion via electronic mail.

1/4

FIG. 1



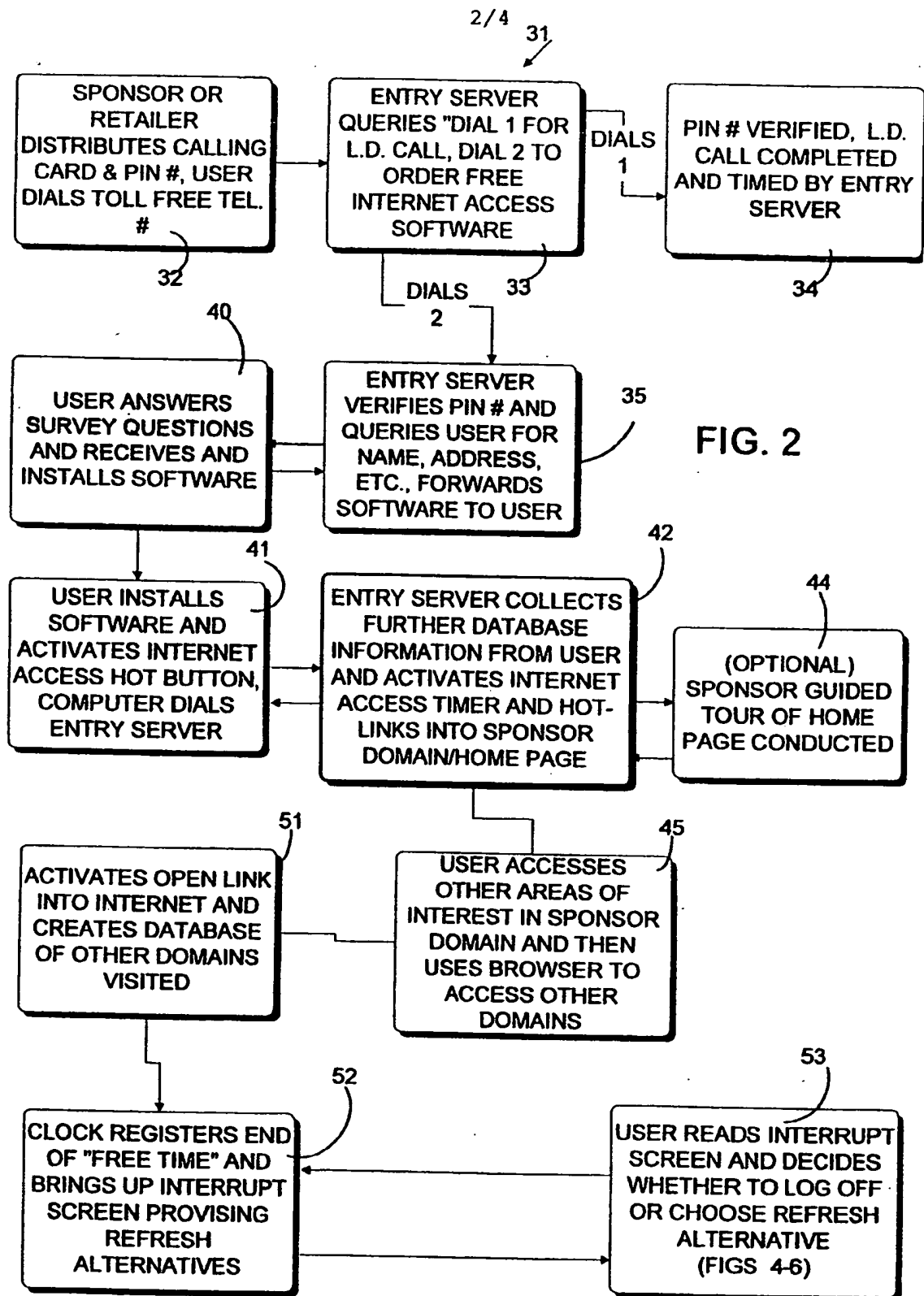
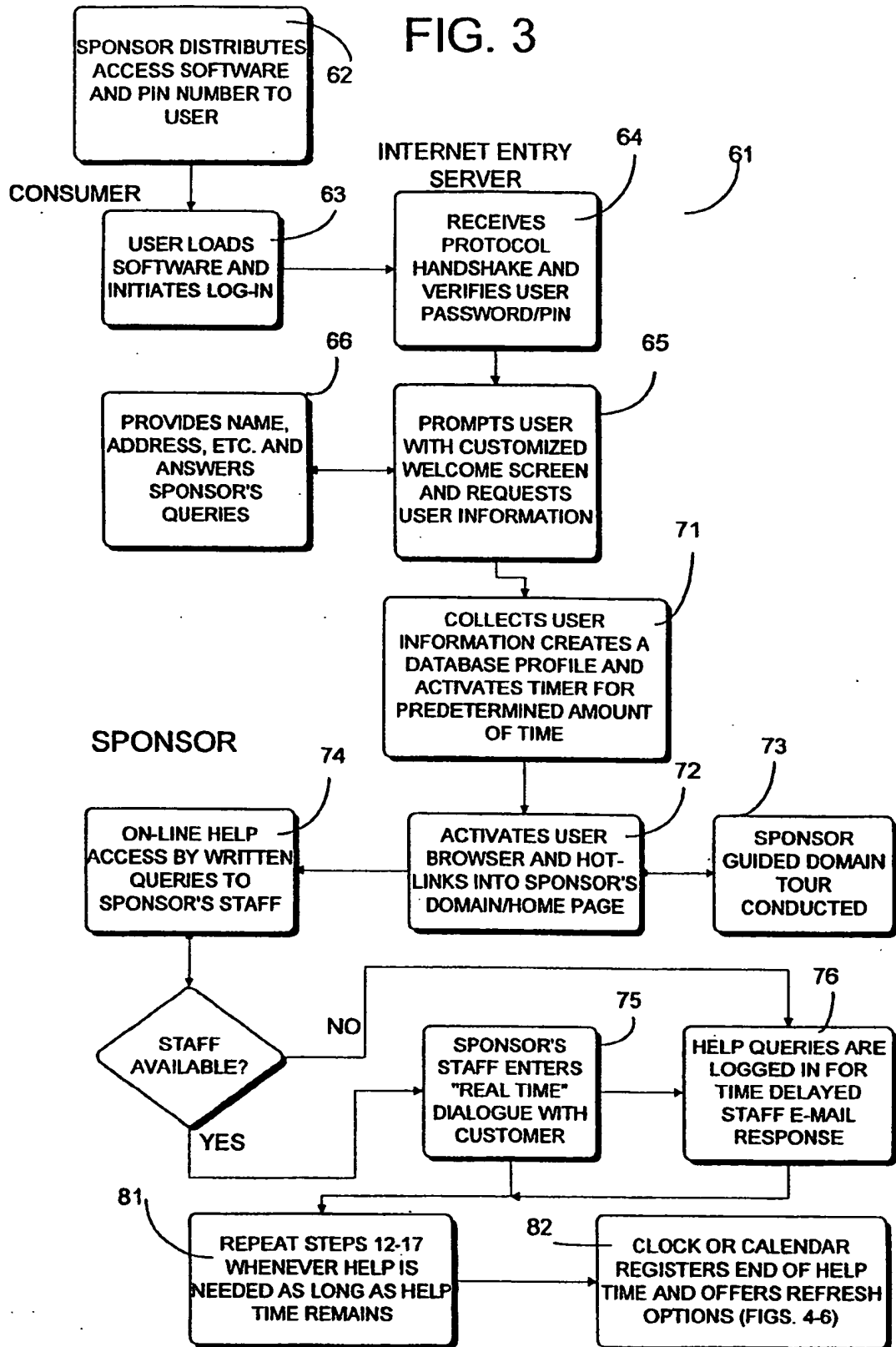
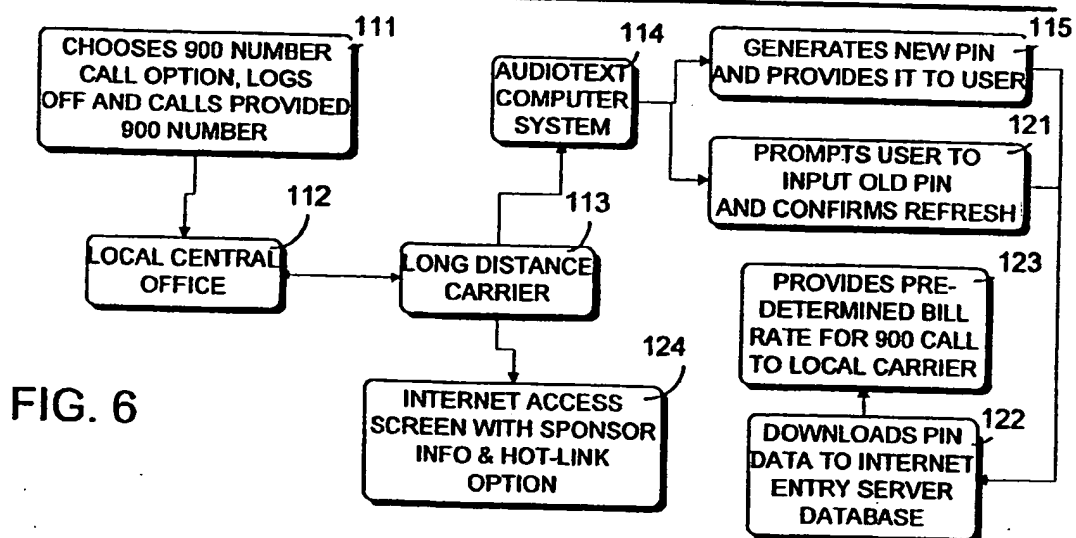
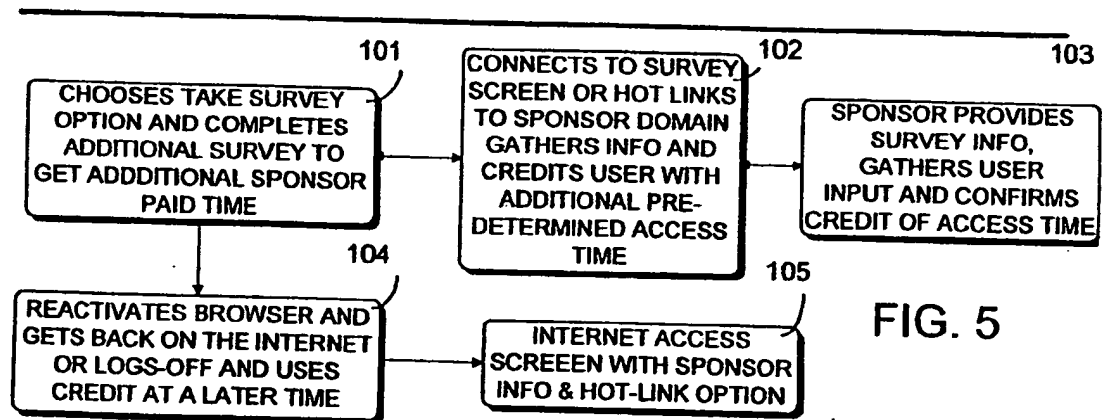
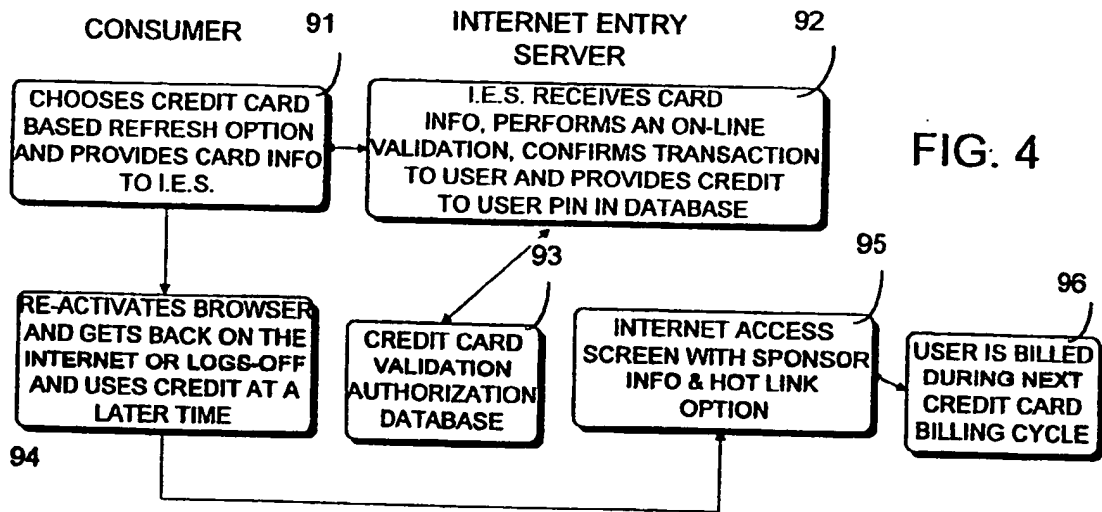


FIG. 3





## INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.  
PCT/US96/08307

**A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER**

IPC(6) : G06F 13/00; 19/00

US CL : 364/401R

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

**B. FIELDS SEARCHED**

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

U.S. : 364/401R

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)  
APS, DIALOG (INTERNET, SURVEYS, GIFTS OR REWARDS, TELEPHONE, CALLS, ACCESS)

**C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT**

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
Y	Telecommunications, Volume 25, Issue 11, November 1991, Scot J. Brnker, "Corporate Bulletin Board Systems: Customer Support and More in the 1990s", pages 33-36, especially pages 33-35	52-70
Y	Computerworld, Volume 28, Issue 46, 14 November 1994, Ellis Booker, "Vendors line up on-line support", page 29.	52-70
X	Software Magazine, Volume 15, Issue 11, October 1995, George Lawton, pages 49-53, especially pages 50 and 53.	52-70

☒ Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C. ☐ See patent family annex.

* Special categories of cited documents:	
*A* document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be part of particular relevance	*T* later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention
*B* earlier document published on or after the international filing date	*X* document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone
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*O* document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means	
*P* document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed	*A* document member of the same patent family

Date of the actual completion of the international search

15 SEPTEMBER 1996

Date of mailing of the international search report

10 OCT 1996

Name and mailing address of the ISA/US  
Commissioner of Patents and Trademarks  
Box PCT  
Washington, D.C. 20231

Facsimile No. (703) 305-3230

Authorized officer

GAIL O. HAYES

Telephone No. (703) 305-9711

## INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.  
PCT/US96/08307

## C (Continuation). DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
Y	The Marketing Revolution, Harvard Business School Press, 1994, Messrs, Blattberg, & Glazer, "Electronic Customer Registration, Customer Acquisition in The Information Age", page 7	52-70
Y	Telecommunications Report (NewsNet), Anonymous, "BellSouth Telecommunications, Inc. Is One Of Several Companies"	31-42
Y	NewsBytes, 04 March 1994, "Baby Bells On The Internet", second paragraph.	31-44
Y	Direct, Volume 7, Issue 5, May 1995, Anonymous, "Compilers Move To Capture Data Online"	1-30 & 45-49
Y	Interactive Facts, Volume 1 No. 14, 06 June 1994, Anonymous, "On-Line Users Survey Results: Electronic Junk Mail-No; Bribes-Maybe"	1-30 & 45-49